

Commitment to Giving
Matthew 16:16-18
Luke 21:1-4
Mark 12:14-17

The Call

Matthew 16:16-18

16 Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

17 Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. 18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. 1

This past week I was having problems with our home computer. So I called our technical support via a 1-800 number. I was switched around and ended up going from the mid-west to Salt Lake City without ever having to re-dial. Isn't technology wonderful?

In the course of all their switching I ended up with a very bad phone connection. The tech support guy could only hear half of what I was saying, and I heard a lot of line noise throughout the phone call. But we managed somehow to accomplish the task before us and over the course of about a half an hour we were able to get the computer running at optimal performance. But our communication was hampered and needed constant repeating along the way. This was not the case with God and Peter.

Peter does make a confession, a confession with his lips that speak of the call of his spirit. The revelation of who Jesus was is not something that Peter's mind could grasp. But his spirit had received a direct call from God and he was listening. No static on that line.

Peter accepted the call for all humanity and made the great confession in answering the call of God. This was a perfect technological wireless connection between God and Peter. Unlike my computer tech call where I eventually ended up in Utah by way of the mid-west and all the interference in between. In God's person to person call there was no interference and no doubt as to where the call had originated from or to whom or by whom it was placed. It was perfect and direct communication.

With the call of God placed we then enter into the cost of the call. To understand the cost of Peter's person to person call a little better lets take a look at Luke 21:1-4,

1 As he looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. 2 He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. 3 “I tell you the truth,” he said, “this poor widow has put in more than all the others. 4 All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.”²

The Cost

Jesus has positioned himself in the entrance of the temple where the offerings are received. Jesus is not alone. With him are his disciples and some of the leadership of the temple that are eavesdropping on Jesus' teaching. Jesus watched the leaders make great show of their gifts. Showing that they sacrifice much for the temple. But Jesus knows the rest of the story. He knows that they give out of their surplus.

¹*The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984.

²*The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984.

Jesus also knows that the temple has become a corrupt religious institution. That it uses the gifts in corrupt ways and revels in the gluttony and greed of some of the leaders of the temple. So Jesus sees the scandal behind their “gifts.”

She walks in a widowed woman. She is poor. She has the clothes on her back and two lepta coins which are worth maybe a penny. Aside from that she has nothing. Jesus observes her. He sees her drop in to the offering all that she has, which in the material scheme of things is really nothing at all. Then he turns and announces, “See that woman over there? She just put in more than everyone put together. She gave all she had. The disciples are probably thinking – “Jesus I can dig more out of my couch than she put in to the offering. What’s the big deal, she’s poor. She won’t advance the work of the temple with a puny offering like that.” But Jesus does not strike out against the offering of the larger group, he does not condemn the corruption of the leadership of the temple (even though he could). He simply makes an observation by weighing everything that was given on that day, using the same standard of impartiality. After someone has given to the temple what do they have remaining? That is what makes the offering of the widow so great, it is not what she gave, it is what she had left. It is not that she gave all, it is that she had nothing left after she gave. Her cost was that all she had left was God. Her total reliance was on Him and Him alone. How large is your faith? Can you give so much that nothing remains and all you have left is God and God alone?

The widow’s gift is great because she understood and even embraced the cost of total devotion to and reliance on God.

So what do we have in these two scriptures – we have the call or our confession of who Christ is, and then we have an understanding of what Christ counts as the cost of that call and finally we have the commitment.

The commitment

In Mark 12:14-17 we hear this about commitment;

14 They came to him and said, “Teacher, we know you are a man of integrity. You aren’t swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? 15 Should we pay or shouldn’t we?”

But Jesus knew their hypocrisy. “Why are you trying to trap me?” he asked. “Bring me a denarius and let me look at it.” 16 They brought the coin, and he asked them, “Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?”

“Caesar’s,” they replied.

17 Then Jesus said to them, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.” And they were amazed at him.³

The “they” that come to Jesus are the Pharisees who are very strict in observance of the law. And the Herodians who are in the religious system but are civilly involved in the government of Herod who is the ruler of this area.

This is a trap. A trap set by these religious leaders and others so that they can show everyone that Jesus is against the government and thus against the people and ultimately against God. You can hear the leaders yelling out “For God and country” in the background as they spring their trap.

At the root of the question is “which way are we to go when it comes to taxes? See the common people were really against the tax. They saw it as an issue of allegiance. Resistance to taxation was a very sore subject with the Roman government also. So the question was “Do we pay money to this government who occupies our land or do we tell them to get lost?”

The coin had the image of Tiberius who was the Caesar, or ruler of that time. The inscription gave him divine honors. In other words it made him out to be a god and thus something that got in the way of

³The New International Version, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984.

the one true God. The temple refused to accept the coin as an offering. The question that looms in my mind is why did the leaders of the temple so easily produce the forbidden coin when Jesus asked to see one? But that is another question for another time.

Jesus answered them with divine wisdom and political skill unrivalled in his day and age. He simply asked a question, "Whose picture is this?" He then tells them to give Caesar what is Caesar's and give to God what is God's. Jesus does not tell the people to pay taxes he simply tells them to give the owner of the coin his coin back. Then Jesus tells them to give to God what is God's. Jesus makes the questioners answer their own question when it comes to whom they give their lives over to.

I wonder. When we, strike that, when I look in the mirror, who do I see stamped on my life? To who have I given my life? When I heard the call of God, did I receive it or hang up? When I heard what Jesus required of me, did I give all so that I had nothing but God, or did I hold out something so I could rely on it for a rainy day? And finally, am I so committed to Jesus Christ that I have given him my whole life with nothing left to give?

How would you answer those questions if they were directed toward you? Do you need to come forward right now and respond to the call, acknowledge the call and commit to the Lord? If the answer is yes, I ask you to come forward as we sing our closing hymn this morning.